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PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE AND CULTURAL PERCEPTION OF TIME

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Two fundamental aspects of cultural intuitive conceptions of time's passage - cyclic and continuous temporality - are here related to clinical psychopathology of post-traumatic stress in Brazil. People with predominantly cyclical cultural perceptions of time tend to see life and death as part of an eternal movement. Severity and persistence of mental trauma are not directly related to the magnitude of the catastrophe or even of the traumatic experience, but rather to the way they pervade the mind and to the roles they represent on it. Modern culture tends to produce individuals prepared to a highly complex world, running in a frantic rhythm and under constant pressure. Nearly all events must be anticipated, planned or controlled, and obsessive traits tend to be facilitated. However, in catastrophic, unpredictable events, when nothing can be done, these full-schedule people may show frailty and despair. Traditional communities seem capable to bear extremely high levels of aggression or suffering - in traumatic and catastrophic situations - without showing proportional signs of mental stress. While in the high social layers of modern communities an act of violence as an assault or rape may have serious and long lasting consequences, in everyday public hospital practice we come across victims of potentially traumatic events without any of the expected devastating effects on their mental life. Periodic dissociative rituals may have a role in their resilience.